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Interim Final Rules for Group Health Plans and Health Insurance Issuers Relating to Coverage of Preventive Services Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Comment On: EBSA-2010-0018-0002

Group Health Plans and Health Insurance Issuers Relating to Coverage of Preventive Services under Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: Amendment

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Comment on FR Doc # 2011-19684

Submitter Information

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General Comment

I wish to express my concern regarding the amendment to the interim final regulation (CMS-992-IFC2) which exempts some religious institutions from providing coverage for contraception as preventive care. This proposed exemption is troubling to me because it is based on a serious misreading of the freedom of religion.

The HHS decision to include full coverage for contraception services and counseling as preventive services is the result of sound judgment about what is good for all society. Allowing certain faith-based organizations to avoid this statute is, in fact, promoting the private interests of one religion—or even one conservative element of that religion—over the consciences of employees. This does not further their special mission to help the common good. Ironically, when the bishops claim to lobby for religious freedom, they are ignoring the moral agency of all the women who would benefit from contraceptive coverage.

The inclusion of family planning as preventive health care requires no one to use it or to endorse it. Nor does it infer that its use is or is not morally legitimate. This guideline involves no restriction on anybody's freedom, religious or otherwise. Indeed, it could be argued that it allows greater freedom.

Religious protections extend to one's personal religious beliefs and practices, but they do not give license to obstruct or coerce the exercise of another's conscience. For that reason, I believe that institution-encompassing refusal clauses are far too broad to be equitable—clamping down, as they do, on the rights of both the professional and the patient.

The HHS can listen to the voices of the majority of Americans who believe related to contraception should not be dictated by employers. I urge you to revoke the proposed exemption and protect the individual freedoms of all those who would seek access to these important healthcare services, regardless of where they work.

Thank you,

Debbie S.